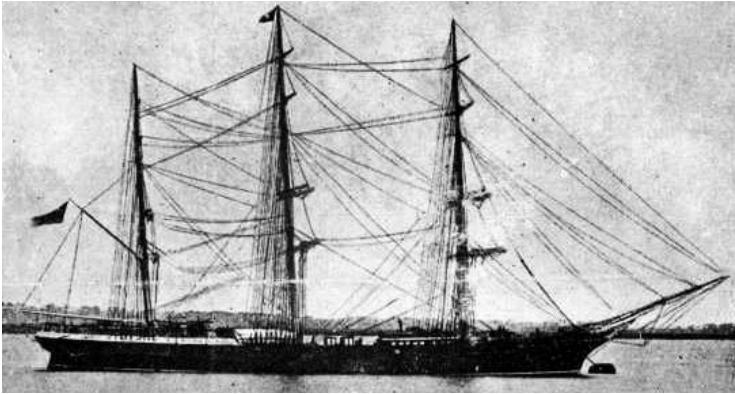


# William<sup>7</sup> Gascoin & Grace James Departure from England in 1879



## NINEVEH

The Ninevah was a 1,174-ton wooden hulled clipper ship, built in 1864 by Walter Hood, Aberdeen, Scotland for the Aberdeen White Star Line (the same company that later built the Titanic). This company was renowned for the smartness of their ships, with their green painted hulls, white masts and spars and gilt scrollwork at their bows and sterns. She was a sister ship to the Kosciusko. The Ninevah was similar in appearance to the Star of Peace and Strathdon, she was considered a lucky ship with her freights and passengers and made a great deal of money for her owners. Her fastest recorded passage from the UK to Sydney was 79 days in 1873, and was used in the wool trade on the homeward voyages, which took about 105 days against unfavourable winds. Later purchased by Goodlet & Smith, Sydney, Australia. In 1896 she was on voyage from British Columbia to Sydney with a cargo of timber, during a gale her cargo shifted, and she was abandoned in the North Pacific in February 1896.

William Gascoin and Grace James both aged 29 and their then four children Elizabeth (Lizzie) aged 7 John aged 5 Charles aged 3 Annie aged 1, along with William's younger brother George aged 24, who was still single at the time, chose to emigrate to Australia, which was crying out for immigrants, and to attract them, was offering assisted passage. They boarded the Nineveh sailing from Plymouth on 10 April 1879 and arrived in Sydney 90 days later on 9 July 1879: their ship carried 403 assisted immigrant. Contract price for each statute adult was £14.19.0

It is not clear what prompted William to opt for Australia rather than follow his brothers to New Zealand; gold had been discovered near Bathurst, New South Wales in 1851, soon to be followed by further discoveries in the area around Talbot at Daisy Hill Creek (later know as Amherst) in 1852. So it would have been well know at the time they left England that there were good pickings to be had in the Gold fields in and around the New South Wales, Victorian border which is where they headed for when they arrived in Sydney. Based on the Government Census and the Birth, Death and Marriage records, we can track the family movements in both Australia and South Africa.

We know that William and his family headed south following their arrival in Sydney as Ethel was born in 1881, two years later in the small town of Balranald situated in the South West of New South Wales, located on the Murrumbidgee River, 852 km southwest of Sydney. In 1847-1848 George James McDonald, the Commissioner for Crown Lands for the Lower Darling District came to the embryo village. McDonald, a Scotsman, was from a small town called Balranald in the Outer Hebrides and perhaps it was natural for him to christen the place "Balranald".

Some time before 1884 the family moved back to Sydney (to the industrial suburbs of Waterloo, Waverley, Petersham, and Auburn). The ship's passenger list had put William down as an engineer. In 1901 (on his daughter Annie's death certificate) he was described as a "civil engineer". Just what sort of engineer he was and where he trained is a mystery: maybe he got some more education or work experience in Leicester before emigrating.

Before 1896 we know that William's eldest son John ended up in the western NSW town of Wilcannia, as it was there in 1896 he married Augusta Wilhelmina Pfeifer. It is not know what took John to Wilcannia many hundreds of kilometres from Sydney or if he was on his own or with the rest of the family. It is assumed that was where he met Augusta.

Wilcannia was notified on 26 June 1866. In 1880 it had a population of 3,000 with 13 hotels and was known as 'The Queen City of the West'. Wilcannia became one of the major ports of the Murray Darling system and the paddle steamer trade flourished for 70 years. In 1887 218 steamers and their barges unloaded stores weighing 36,170 tons, and 222 loaded wool and other produce weighing 26,552 tons at the port of Wilcannia. At one time there were 30 steamers loading or unloading. There were 90 steamers plying the Darling in 1890. The total distance from Wilcannia to Goolwa at the mouth of the Murray is 1,110 river miles. Eventually rail and road transport killed the riverboats and Wilcannia lost its former glory. Many fine buildings from the era remain in good condition making Wilcannia one of the best-preserved historic towns in Australia.